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A Historical Sketch of the Movement for a Political Separation of the two Californias, Northern and Southern, under both the Spanish and American Regimes.

DR. J. P. WIDNEY.

[Read February 4, 1889.]

THE tendency to a separation of California into two distinct political divisions is not new. It dates back into the old Mexican era of the Pacific Coast. During the Mexican regime, in the years before the country came under the American flag, the contest for supremacy between Northern and Southern California rarely ceased, varying in intensity and bitterness with the varying exigencies and fortunes of the various administrations of the colonial government.

The last capitol of the two Californias before the American occupation, was Los Angeles. The discovery of gold in the northern sierra, which came almost with the date of the American occupation, and the sudden rush of population to the mines, gave to Northern California an advantage in the struggle which long continued through the start thus given, and through the superior facilities offered by San Francisco harbor as a commercial point.

The southern portion of this territory, however, at the time of the admission of California into the Union as a state in 1850, went into the civil compact reluctantly, and only because the isolation of the new people upon a distant coast, and the possibilities of foreign dangers rendered an intimate union of the whole coast for the time being, desirable for purposes of common defense. Southern California was, however, restive under the newer order of things, feeling that its best development could only come with the stimulus and freedom of a separate political life. Animated by this feeling, a movement for the division of the state was made ten years later. In 1859 an act was passed by the state legislature entitled "An act granting the consent of the legislature to the formation of a different government for the southern counties of this state." The line of division, as specified in the act, embraced the counties of San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Bernardino and a portion of Buena Vista. The act, by order of the Legislature, was put to vote by the people of the counties in question; it was carried by an overwhelming vote. The returns, together with the act, were certified to by Governor Latham, and forwarded by him officially to the United States government at Washington. The intense

national excitement over the questions which led to the civil war delayed action, and with the breaking out of hostilities further action for the completion of the division was postponed. In the turmoil of war, and in the settlement of great national questions which agitated the country in the years that followed, the subject of further action in the matter remained in abeyance. Occasional allusions in the public print showed, however, that it was only slumbering. In 1880 Governor J. G. Downey republished, over his own signature, in the Los Angeles Evening Express of May 8th, the original act, together with a statement that he believed the act to remain valid despite the lapse of years, and that only the consent of Congress was needed to make the action final.

In the February number of the Californian, 1881, a monthly periodical printed in San Francisco, now the Overland Monthly, I published an article upon the division of the state, in which I discussed at length the geographical, topographical, climatic and commercial laws which lie back of and which produce this tendency to a separation, and stated that the natural working of these laws would in the end lead to a separation of the state into two distinct civil organizations, and that while it might be delayed, this division of the state was in the end inevitable. The publication of that article brought down upon the head of the writer a storm of personal abuse and vituperation from the papers of Northern California, notably from those of San Francisco, which was new to the discussion. It might reasonably be inferred, from the storm which it raised, that the reasons given in the article had in them somewhat of truth, and that the force of the article was felt, as men do not ordinarily devote so much energy to refute what they deem idle fallacies.

Several weeks later, at a citizens' mass meeting held in Los Angeles, February 1, 1881, upon the subject of Wilmington harbor improvement, in the course of a speech upon that topic, I proposed that the subject of state division should also be taken up. The suggestion was at once acted upon, and after a number of speeches from various gentlemen strongly favoring the movement, an executive committee, consisting of Messrs. E. F. Spence, J. P. Widney, J. G. Downey, A. B. Moffitt, J. G. Estudillo and W. H. Perry, were selected to take charge of the work.

This executive committee selected a legal committee to which they referred the following questions in order that the legal status of the movement might be made clear.

First. Is the legislative act of 1859, as voted upon by the people, and forwarded to Congress, with the certificate of the governor of California, still in force?

Second. If that act is still in force, what legal steps are necessary to complete the division, and establish the new state of Southern California?

Third. If that act is no longer in force, what other course will become necessary to effect a division?

The answer was as follows:

First. The act of the legislature of the State of California entitled "An act granting the consent of the legislature to the formation of a different government for the southern counties of this state," approved April 18th, 1859, page 310, is in full force and effect.

Second. Under article IV, section 3, of the constitution of the United States, it only remains for Congress to admit the new state with a republican form of government.

Third. To secure this last action no legal forms are required.

Fourth. The mode most nearly conforming to precedent would be to secure the united action of a representation from each of the counties in the proposed new state, calling an election to elect delegates to a constitutional convention to be held at some designated time and place. Such a constitutional convention would then prepare a form of constitution for the new state and submit the same to a vote of the people, and upon its adoption and presentation to Congress, and the act of Congress admitting the new state, the work would be complete.

Fifth. The election should be held as nearly as possible in accordance with the forms of our present election laws.

(Signed:) THOM & STEPHENS.
H. T. HAZARD.
C. E. THOM.
R. M. WIDNEY.
A. BRUNSON.
S. C. HUBBELL.
GEORGE H. SMITH.
H. A. BARCLAY.

A circular letter was thereupon sent by the executive committee to the Democratic and Republican county committees of San Diego, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara San Luis Obispo, Kern and Inyo, requesting the appointment of delegates to a convention to be held in Los Angeles, September 8, 1881, to consider the advisability of taking further action in the matter.

The convention met, many of the delegates being present, and the question was thoroughly discussed. The prevailing sentiment was that the division of the state was a necessity; that only by the establishment of a separate state could the full development and growth of Southern California be brought about; but the feeling seemed to be that the time had as yet hardly arrived to take the step. With this understanding, and with the further understanding that when a favorable time should occur a united movement would be made to the accomplishment of that end, the convention adjourned.

From this time on the subject never remained quiescent, but became a topic of constant discussion, in the public press, and among the people.

Early in the present session of Congress (1888-9) General William Van-

dever, representative in Congress for this district, introduced a bill in the House providing for the taking of steps anew for the division of the state. That bill is now on file awaiting its turn for consideration in the order of business.

A few days afterward, a public meeting was called in the city of Los Angeles to take up the work. At that meeting a committee was appointed to elect an executive committee to take charge of the movement. That committee has not yet made public its action.

